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RECOLLECTIONS OF THE OLD COACHING-DAYS.

PEOPLE of middle age are privileged with recollecting the old coaching-system, just when it came to perfection, and was suddenly superseded by the introduction of railways. In a national point of view, the change has been advantageous beyond all calculation. In some other respects, it is matter for regret; for, by the old way of travelling, there was more cheerfulness in driving along the highways, as well as more safety, than in being dragged on the rails at a speed sometimes fearful, and often disastrous. It is needless, however, to moralise on this point. The change was inevitable, and has been effected. All we can do as a matter of sentiment, and for the sake of young persons, is to call up passing memories of a system of road-travelling now gone for ever.

A hundred years ago, stage-coaches drawn by four horses had established themselves on all the great routes. They were an improvement on the more ancient stage-wagons, but were still very defective. What with frequent stoppages, and the execrable state of the roads, a journey by them was tedious and expensive. In contrast with what had gone before them, they were called flying-coaches, but their flight was by no means excessive. At the utmost, they did not on an average make out more than eight miles an hour. In going from Manchester to London, two nights were spent on the road. Yet, these flying-coaches were not to be despised. They were the precursors of a great reform in transit, effected, by a man of singularly energetic nature, in 1784. This was John Palmer, a person of substance, who established and conducted a theatre at Bath. Palmer had often occasion to desire the assistance of actors from London, but was balked by the dilatoriness of the transit of post-letters and the slow method of travelling. For example, a letter sent from London on Monday did not reach Bath till Wednesday. Business could not be carried on with any degree of satisfaction with such intolerable delays.

Smarting under these difficulties, Palmer travelled all over the country, and found everywhere the same insufficiency. He memorialised the government; he took means to spread information; and clearly shewed how easy it would be to effect vast improvements. For a time, his efforts were vain. He was set down as a half-crazed enthusiast. The post-office authorities were against him to a man. It was only through the enlightened judgment of Pitt that he was able to commence that system of rapid mail-coaches which lasted up to the days of railways. The first mail-coach in accordance with Palmer's plan was one from London to Bristol, which started at eight o'clock in the morning of the 8th August 1784, and reached its destination at eleven at night. This was thought marvellous. In a few years, Palmer's mail-coaches, as they were at first called, were established on all the great roads; the mails being carried with an economy, precision, and despatch hitherto unknown. The benefits to the public became quickly too manifest to be denied; but mark how Palmer was treated! The government had entered into a regular contract with him, engaging to give him two-and-a-half per cent. upon the saving effected in the transmission of letters. It was speedily shewn that this saving amounted to twenty thousand pounds a year. Parliament, however, would not vote for the fulfilment of the bargain, and arbitrarily extinguished Palmer's claim with a grant of fifty thousand pounds.

In the early years of the present century, the mail-coaches originated by Palmer had superseded nearly all the old conveyances; their success being considerably promoted by the great improvements effected on the roads by Telford and Macadam. As the mail-coaches began, so they ended. They had a peculiar compactness and neatness. Each vehicle, drawn by four well-matched horses, was painted a sober brownish-red colour, bearing the royal arms and the words 'Royal Mail.' Inside, there were seats for four persons; outside, in front, was the box-seat for the driver, and space for one passenger beside him. Beneath their feet, was the front boot, for holding the passengers' luggage, the

amount of which was very limited—thirty pounds to each—also any small parcels carried for hire. Behind the box-seat, on the front of the roof, was a seat for three outside passengers. Such was the whole accommodation—four in and four out sides. Behind, was seen the single seat for the guard, fixed on iron supports over the hind boot, which held the mails. The guard, who might be called the main-spring and director, sat with his face towards the horses, commanding a view of the whole equipage. Usually imposing in appearance, with a jolly red weather-beaten face, he was a man of trust and importance. His duty as guard was by no means nominal. When the passengers had arranged themselves in the seats booked for them, it might be days previously, and when the driver had taken his seat on the box, out came the guard from the office, placing the way-bill carefully in his breast-pocket, with the gravity of a soldier going to battle. He is dressed in the royal uniform—a capacious scarlet surtout, trimmed with gold lace, hat with a gold band, a pair of pistols hung in a belt round his neck, and a blunderbuss in his hand. His horn, a long tin trumpet, is already stuck on the coach near his seat. Mounting up, he arranges the pistols and blunderbuss in a longish box with a sloping lid on the hind part of the roof, so as to be ready for action in case of an attempted attack by highwaymen. With a blast of the horn, off goes His Majesty's mail—yet not off altogether, for as a last thing it drives to the post-office, to get the bags stowed into the hind boot; and this being but the work of half a minute, the machine is at length fairly off, everything giving way before it on the street or road.

Such is our recollection of the starting of a mail-coach on its journey in 1814, when the system was in all its glory. The coaches were the property of the government, which accordingly regulated the hours of departure according to the exigencies of the mail-service; from all the large towns there being ordinarily a morning and evening departure. The horses were hired by contract. His Majesty's mails had one grand show-off day in the year. It was the 4th of June, the king's birth-day—we speak of the reign of George III.—when the coaches, renewed or furbished up, the horses with fresh trappings, and the guards and drivers in their new scarlet coats, were paraded through the streets of London, and drove off in style from St Martin's-le-Grand on their several ways, amidst a concourse of spectators. On a lesser scale, there were similar exhibitions in the larger provincial towns. With what delight did the youngsters regard these splendid cavalcades!

Altogether, the mail-coach system was a creditable national effort. It was the utmost that could be done, according to the means at disposal. Unfortunately, it depended on animal exertion. The horses required to be changed at a posting-house every ten miles at most, and although the process of changing was latterly effected with remarkable celerity, time was lost, and the rate of speed did not ordinarily get above ten miles an hour, including stoppages, if so much. In a few cases, where the roads were smooth and level, or with very slight ups-and-downs, to vary the pull of the horses, a speed of ten and a half miles was effected. When the journey to be performed could be managed in about four hours, there was nothing serious to complain of. Very different was the

case of a journey of four hundred miles between Edinburgh and London, which, by the greatest effort, could not be effected in less than fifty-two hours, involving two nights in succession on the road. In a ride like this, the cold suffered by the outsides in winter was, of course, dreadful; the insides at the same time being worn out by sitting in a cramped position, and enduring a variety of privations.

Charming was the drive outside in a fine day through a new and interesting country, and if not too protracted, it left many pleasant remembrances. Night-travelling on the long journeys was the crucial test, as, for example, in crossing Shap Fell at midnight. A continued snow-storm was awful—outsides, driver, and guard muffled up in huge greatcoats and comforters, doing their best to keep warmth in them, amidst the pitiless storm; the poor toiling horses plunging in the snow; the lamps in the vehicle half-battered up, throwing a feeble light over the wild desolate heath. Sometimes the coach stuck in the drifts; and there were cases in which the guard, with a noble fidelity to duty, fought his way forward on foot, with the mail-bag on his shoulders, to the nearest town, leaving the coach and passengers to be rescued by such assistance as he was able to procure.

Viewed in their best aspect, the mail-coaches were insufficient for the traffic. For a time, they absorbed the business of the older-fashioned stage-coaches, but these rallied under better management, and at length they formed the principal reliance. How could it be otherwise? The limited passenger accommodation offered by His Majesty's mail was wholly inadequate for the growing traffic of the country. There were six times more travelling than the mails could accommodate. The mails in themselves got through their work with difficulty. Such was the increase of letter-bags, that the hind boot no longer sufficed. Large bags were piled on the roof under tarpaulins, destructive of all symmetry, and forming an obstacle to transit in the event of snow-storms. Still keeping their ground, and to the last reckoned the genteel thing by which to travel, His Majesty's mails could make no head against the crowd of spirited interlopers, whose sole object was to carry large numbers of passengers at an accommodating scale of charges.

With this growing accession to vehicular conveyance, recollections now assume a new phase. All over the country there are flying stage-coaches, pretentious in their name and character—the Regent, the Blucher, the High Flyer, the Rob Roy, the Wellington, and so on, each warranted by advertisement to be more expeditious than anything ever heard of. These coaches went far beyond the mail in point of accommodation. Each carried six inside, and as many as twelve outside passengers. Luggage was more freely taken; and at certain seasons, such as at Christmas, there was an immense addition to the packages and baskets, which clung all around like clusters of bees. Where there was so much trade, something like a guard or supercargo was necessary. Each stage-coach of an affectedly high class was therefore provided with a guard, so called, who wore a scarlet tunic—usually a smart fellow, who sat among the hind outsiders, and on entering or leaving the town was so gracious as to play popular airs on a keyed bugle. Very gay affairs were some of these

stage-coaches, as they drove off from the White Horse Cellar in Piccadilly, the Saracen's Head, Snowhill, the Belle Sauvage in Ludgate Hill, or some other crack office in London. In every town there must be lingering traditions of their sprightly doings.

As will be seen, there was a dash of fun and romance in the old mail and stage coach system. It had, however, independently of what was sometimes suffered from cold and fatigue, two drawbacks—the hurried way in which meals had to be taken; and the incessant demand for fees by coachmen and guards. Twenty minutes were allowed for dinner; but often the articles produced were ill-cooked, or not ready on arrival, and the meal was little better than a means of extorting money for nothing. Sometimes, under a sense of being cheated, when the horn blew, and all had to take the road before the dinner was half eaten, the enraged passengers did themselves justice in a rude way, by carrying off roast-fowls and other articles from the table, to be eaten at leisure on the journey. Of an incident of this kind we were on one occasion a witness. Whether the meals were well or ill served, waiters or waitresses did not fail to ask for the customary fees. On several routes there were grand-looking inns where the coaches stopped, but no provision at any of them was made for the pressing discomfort of the much tired passengers. The whole process of accommodation at these stopping-places was simply organised plunder. Landladies of a knowing turn had a knack of turning the penny by selling articles for which the locality happened to be reputed. The hostess of the inn at Stilton, for example, was an adept at palming off Stilton cheeses, in which, from the number of coaches that stopped at her house, she may be said to have carried on a considerable trade.

The outrageous thing, on which passengers expended no small degree of temper, was the taxing by coachmen and guards. At certain stages, on resigning the reins, the coachman came round, touching his hat with his finger, hinting as to his fee. Most of the passengers got off by giving him sixpence, others gave a shilling. The guards went farther on the journey, and expected half-a-crown. Of the wrangling and grumbling about these fees, which certainly were not included in the contract, there was literally no end. And no wonder. After paying several pounds for your seat from one place to another, it was very hard to have to pay perhaps half as much more in the course of the journey to coachmen and guards, whose services ought to have been directly compensated by employers. This beggarly custom of exacting sixpences, shillings, and half-crowns all along the road was an infamy of which the railways have happily rid the process of modern travelling. If, against all remonstrance, the public recur to the reprehensible practice of giving *backsheesh* to guards, they will have themselves to blame for the consequences.

One of the effects of distribution of money among the drivers and guards of coaches was to make them obsequious and overbearing, as well as extravagant in their expenditure. The coachman was often a very pompous personage, priding himself on his waistcoats, his cravats, and his jewellery. We remember seeing one of these puffed-up gentry who wore a greatcoat with buttons of half-crowns, and every button on his waist-

coat was a sixpence—a piece of vulgar wastefulness, designed to add to his dignity. Coachmen of this order were pampered by young gentlemen who took a fancy for the box-seat, and the pleasure of 'handling the ribbons,' for which indulgence they of course imparted 'a consideration.' It is not a very high aim in life to be a coach-driver; but in these times, a seat on the box, with reins and whip in hand, and gossip about horses, formed an object of supreme ambition. Some of these amateurs gained proficiency in driving the stage-coaches, but the practice was hazardous for passengers, and it occasionally led to an overturn. Cambridge scholars, as we learn, attained celebrity for their skill in driving. A book has lately been written by one of these gentlemen coach-drivers, Mr Reynardson, giving a lively account of his experiences on the box in old times.

Where is now all that wide-spread and highly appreciated system of travelling?—annihilated, gone, only lingering fragmentarily in small patches of country, to which the rail has scarcely ventured to intrude. Its abolition laid low a great 'interest,' for which no one ever expressed any particular pity. Nor was any pity deserved. The systematic sanctioning of pillage by coachmen and guards, contrary to all decency, was an outrage which deprived the coaching proprietary of any commiseration. The ruin which overtook the roadside inns by the withdrawal of the coaches, was not unregretted; for extortionate as many of these establishments had been, they were useful as resting-places for ordinary travellers, and their general extinction is, doubtless, a public loss. Having had its day, coach-travelling has been superseded by a system infinitely more stupendous, and through the agency of which—with all its faulty management, arising from human infirmity—the country in the space of forty years has advanced centuries. The mail and stage coaches of our young days were picturesque, with many points of interest and convenience, but in the background there was much that was rude and offensive, not the least odious detail being the infliction of frightful cruelty on animals. With the improved travelling of our own day, there can be no comparison. The railway train is science, wealth, progress, civilisation.

W. C.

WALTER'S WORD.

CHAPTER XXIX.—TO THE RESCUE.

No longer discomposed by any apprehensions of the nature of his reception, since it was clear the vessel was tenantless, Walter yet hesitated to set foot on her deck. Some spectacle—he knew not what—might be awaiting him in that silent ship, which it was better for him to die than see. He had read, in history or romance, of Saltee rovers—pirates of the Mediterranean—and the wild fancy struck him, and chilled his blood, that some catastrophe might have happened to—to those on board (he did not dare say, even to himself, to Lilian), such as had been common half a century ago, though even then not close to the shores of Sicily. The idea was monstrous; but the fact before them—a ship in full sail, but empty, with her boat towing at her stern—was monstrous too, and not to be explained on reasonable grounds. While he still stood sick at heart, half resolved, half

disinclined to know the worst, Francisco settled the matter for him. 'She will be ashore in five minutes, signor,' he cried, 'if we do not drop her anchor.' And with that, he sprang on board, and Walter followed, to assist him. The lad's gestures were eloquence itself, and, besides, by this time Walter had acquired some considerable knowledge of the island tongue.

Having succeeded in bringing the yacht to a stand-still, the two young men proceeded to make a thorough investigation of her. The deck was clean, and the neat coils of rope were in their proper places, shewing no traces of any struggle. The brass-bound steps that led to the little saloon, and the brass rails beside them, shone bright in the pale moonlight, and bespoke the latest and most scrupulous care. On the table were the remains of a luxurious dessert, with wine and glasses—one of the latter of which was broken. A knife was lying beside the fragments of it on the floor. Of the three chairs that had been so lately occupied, one was also overturned. Besides these, there were no traces of disorder. The door, however, at the extremity of this apartment shewed traces of having been battered in. It opened into the stern-cabin which they had already examined through the window, and which had evidently been used as the ladies' boudoir. An harmonium stood open with a music-book upon it; and on a sewing-machine was a small phial containing oil, and standing in an upright position. Here, then, Lillian had sat, and worked, and played but, at most, a few hours ago, and until the moment when some mysterious fate befell herself and all the other occupants of the little vessel. The broken panels of the door were an indisputable proof of violence, but from whose hands? was a question as unanswerable as ever. On board an English yacht upon a pleasure-cruise, the idea of mutiny was not to be entertained for a moment; moreover, the ship's boat would have been used by the mutineers to get to land. The attack, then, if attack there had been, must needs have come from without. Judging from what they saw, the resistance must have been small, which, considering that the crew consisted of four British sailors beside the captain, was unlikely to have been the case, unless the thing had been effected by surprise. No other cabin shewed any signs of hurry of departure on the part of its inmates; but in Lillian's own little bower—Walter entered it with a sensation of sacrilege—the door of a species of wardrobe stood wide open, as though some article—probably a shawl or cloak, of which there were several on its shelves—had been snatched from it in haste. Save the above indications, all below-stairs was just as it might have been in Palermo harbour. Upon deck, however, a second examination revealed some blood-stains close to the tiller, which marked the place, perhaps, where the steersman had been struck down by some unseen or unexpected foe.

'Great Heaven! there has been murder done!' murmured Walter hoarsely. Was it possible that the butchery had been wholesale, and that the bodies of the victims had been cast into the sea? His knees trembled, and a sharp spasm shot across his heart at this frightful thought, which was, however, dismissed almost as soon as entertained. Strong men fighting for their lives, even though unarmed and taken by surprise, would have left more evidences of their cruel fate than this. In-

deed, save for that one bloody token, it was difficult to believe that any act of violence could have been committed, so neat and orderly was the ship, so peaceful the fair scene in which it lay. The dark-blue sea was without a ripple, save where the broad silver pathway of the moon made inequalities on its surface visible; the shore, close to which they were, was fringed with orchards, and the mountain sides beyond were richly cultivated.

'Francisco,' exclaimed Walter, 'for Heaven's sake, speak a word to me, or I shall go mad! What has happened? What can have happened? This is your own land—not mine. I feel like one in a hideous dream, where all is unreal and monstrous. Have you any explanation of this frightful thing to offer? Have you any hope to give me; if not, at least tell me your fears.'

Francisco looked furtively towards the shore, and laid a finger on his lips. 'Yes, signor, I think I know what has happened,' answered he in his soft musical tones. 'Come down here into the cabin; there is no knowing who may be watching us up here, or whose sharp ears may be listening.'

'Well, well, what is it?' inquired Walter impatiently, when they had descended the stairs. 'You would never look like that, if my friends had been murdered, surely.'

'O no, signor; there has been no murder,' answered Francisco quietly—that is, unless there was some absolute necessity for it. Milord and the signora in any case are safe; I will stake my life on that. Look you, the "yat" was becalmed and close in shore; and these gentlemen of the mountains—'

'What! the brigands?'

'Hush! Yes; they doubtless came out in boats, and captured her by surprise.'

'But who ever heard of brigands turning pirates?'

'No one, signor, up to this moment; but the circumstances, you must allow, were very uncommon. Milord's departure was a most serious disappointment for them. They took it—it is no wonder—much to heart, and clung to hope to the last. They had scouts all along the shore, or, perhaps, they watched the vessel from their own woods up yonder, and descended when the opportunity offered. I don't know that it was so, but to me, who am acquainted with the captain, it seems probable.'

'The captain! What captain?'

'Corralli.'

'Great Heaven! Do you think, then, that my countrymen have become his captives?'

Head, eyes, and fingers all combined in giving a most unmistakable 'I do.'

'But the signora?'

'She is doubtless in his hands, but only for the present. He will send her back, since the troops will be called out, and she would impede his flight. But he will keep milord.'

'They will not injure the young lady in any way?' asked Walter imploringly, as though it had been in Francisco's power to prevent them.

'Certainly not. There are women in the band: the captain's sister, Joanna, is always with him, and has power; the signora will doubtless be placed under her protection.'

Walter shuddered. How horrible was the idea of Lillian needing such a chaperon! How horrible, and how incongruous! Could he be really

talking about the same girl whom he had seen surrounded with the conventional attributes of wealth in London; serene and quiet, in her garden at Willowbank; gracious at her father's table; and whom he had last met among that commonplace crowd in the garden of Regent's Park! And now it was more than probable that she was held captive by a lawless bandit among yonder hills! The very means by which he had become acquainted with the fact—the little Sicilian dictionary he held in his hand, and without which, half of Francisco's communication would have been lost upon him—was an element in this incongruity, and helped to give a grotesqueness, which, however, was very far from being laughable, to this mysterious drama.

Walter had listened to his companion's words with enforced attention, but now that the information had been obtained—now that he had something to go upon—he became all impatience for action. Every moment in which he was not engaged in promoting Lilian's release seemed a waste of time, and a reproach to his loving heart. 'Our best plan, I conclude,' said he hastily, 'is at once to return to Palermo, and give notice of what has occurred to the police.'

'To the police? O no, signor.'

'To the soldiers, then?'

'Nay; that would be worse still. Your best hope to see milord again is to communicate with—his banker.'

Walter was astounded; it seemed to him that Francisco was humouring British prejudices, in making a commercial transaction out of this abominable outrage.

'Indeed, signor,' continued the other quietly, 'that is your best chance. If you can get the ransom before the government stirs in the matter, your friends may be released at once; but, otherwise, the transaction will be forbidden; the soldiers will be sent out, and there will be danger. Not to the signora,' he added hastily, perceiving Walter to change colour. 'I cannot but think that she will be sent home in safety. But, to her father—If Corrali is now disappointed of a plot he has so long calculated upon, he will be capable—it is idle to deny it—of any atrocity.'

'But how shall I know what is the sum demanded?'

'There is no fear upon that point,' answered Francisco, smiling. 'To-morrow, or the next day—so soon as he considers himself in safety, Corrali will send in his terms.'

'But, in the meanwhile, we are losing precious time,' broke in Walter impatiently. 'If we were in Palermo now, for example, a pursuit might be organised, and these brigands forced to give up their prey.'

'It would be the height of imprudence, even then, signor,' replied Francisco confidently; 'but we are not in Palermo, nor could we sail there in this calm under six hours at quickest.'

'But we could go by land in half that time.'

'The signor can go, if he wishes it,' was the stolid reply. 'For myself, I have seen Captain Corrali face to face already; I do not desire another interview. It is true he may be in the mountains by this time; but his people are everywhere, and on the road to Palermo to-night, above all places—you may be sure of it—to intercept this very news.'

A look of contempt came into Walter's face, but instantly died away. This lad had good reason to shun the brigands, whether his fears on this occasion were well grounded or not. He was not in love with Lilian, nor interested in saving the money of Mr Christopher Brown. It was unreasonable, therefore, to despise him—who, moreover, had a father who loved him as the apple of his eye—for refusing to risk life and liberty on such an errand.

'Francisco,' said Walter gently, 'take you the boat at once back to Palermo, and give information of what has occurred, if I have not already done so. Should you not find me at home, go straight to Sir Reginald Selwyn, at the *Hôtel de France*, and tell him what has happened. And now, put me ashore.'

Unmistakable compassion looked softly out of Francisco's eyes. 'The way is long,' he said—'twelve miles at the very least; and it is doubtful whether at any village the signor will find a conveyance.'

'No matter; I can run the distance in three hours. The road goes by the coast, does it not, and cannot be mistaken?'

'The road is straight enough, but—Is the signor quite determined?'

They had reached the deck by this time, and Walter's only answer was to step into the boat which was fastened alongside the yacht. The muffled dip of the oars alone broke the silence of sea and shore; the hills, the woods, seemed steeped in slumber; through the orchard trees the white road could be seen empty and silent.

'Keep in the centre,' whispered Francisco, pointing towards it, 'and do not stop for a shot or two. They do not shoot well, flying, these gentlemen. But if they once capture you, make no attempt to escape, or they will kill you to a certainty—that is a point of honour with them.'

Here the boat touched land, and Walter leaped lightly upon the shore.

'Good-bye, Francisco, till to-morrow morning,' said he cheerfully. 'I shall beat you by three hours, for a ducat.'

'Good-bye, signor; and may the blessed saints protect you from all harm!'

The next moment, the boat had shot into the bay, and Walter was pushing his way through the little orchard that lay between the sea and the high-road.

CHAPTER XXX.—ON THE ROAD.

Rapid motion of any sort is detrimental to human thought, and especially that of one's own legs. As Walter's feet beat quickly on the hard road, something seemed also to beat within his brain; the ideas in it were jostled together, and if one of them got uppermost for a brief space, it was soon usurped by another. At first, fear was dominant—fear, not upon his own account at all; when a man is hopeless, he feels no fear. If Lilian had ever been within his reach, or even if she had promised herself to him in the case, however improbable, of her father giving consent to their union, life would have been inexpressibly dear to Walter, and he would have shrunk from losing it. As it was, Captain Corrali, or any other gentleman of his calling, was welcome to it, or seemed to be so. So far as he was personally concerned, it was a pleasure to be thus risking it for her sweet sake; it was but a

poor thing, and scarcely to be counted as a sacrifice; but it might be valuable just now to her, and therefore it behoved him to preserve it. He looked, therefore, sharply to right and left, and kept the middle of the road, as Francisco had advised him to do.

On the left was always rising ground, which by degrees reached mountain height, with its summit but rarely visible; on the right, were sometimes orchards, or cultivated plots of ground, and sometimes only the sea-beach. There was no sign of life on any hand. There is nothing so wearisome as indolence, and hence the Sicilian retires early; still, the evidence of man's labour convinced him that he could not be very far from some village, or at least a human habitation. When one is running, one's aspirations are limited, and to find an inn with a horse in its stable was the summit of Walter's ambition for the present; that would enable him the more quickly to reach Selwyn, whom for the last fortnight it had been his constant endeavour to avoid. Everything in the world is by comparison—which accounts, perhaps, for so much of it being odious—and what had been his bane, he now longed for. The embarrassment, the humiliation, which such a meeting would cost him, the imputations which it would necessarily lay him under—all these had sunk out of sight, and left Lillian's deliverance alone visible. He was not much moved by Francisco's arguments against employing force in the matter; the lad had doubtless inherited some timidity from his father, and his own captivity by the brigands, when he was but a boy, had given him, probably, an undue impression of their courage and tenacity of purpose. He thought that if the government would only send out troops enough, the scoundrels must soon be surrounded, and compelled to deliver up their prisoners. In the meantime, it was their interest to treat them well; and, thank Heaven, the night was warm and dry, and Lillian, delicate though she was, might take no harm from her temporary captivity. It was impossible, at the rate he was going—though he took care not to press the pace too much, since it might be necessary at any moment to 'put on a spurt'—to look below the surface of things; moreover, it was above all things essential to keep a sharp eye on the road. Though using as much caution as he could, his footsteps rang out in the silence, and must needs give notice of his approach to any one on the watch. Presently, he heard another sound from the hilly ground which was in that part covered with scrub—low trees with a thick undergrowth; a sharp hissing or kissing noise. He stopped a moment to listen, and it was repeated farther on, and therefore less clearly. It might very well proceed from some bird, or even insect, with the nature of which he was unacquainted; yet it startled him, and he mechanically increased his speed, keeping more to the orchard side of the road. In this he erred, for at that moment a man clothed in sheep-skin, and with a gun in his hand, sprang out from it, exclaiming something, which was probably an equivalent for the old British 'Stand, sir!'

Walter had been an idle man at college, but had learned something from an outside professor, who taught Self-defence, and especially the useful art of hitting out quickly from the shoulder. No sooner had this wolf in sheep's clothing thus addressed him, than seizing the barrel of the gun

with one hand, he knocked him down with the other. At the same moment, the low wall on the other side of the road became a parapet for gun-barrels—one, two, three, four; he could count them, as they shone dull and cold in the moonlight; and again the warning cry, 'Stand, sir!' rang out, as it seemed, from half-a-dozen mouths. Walter's reply was to bound forward like an antelope. 'They do not shoot well, flying, these gentlemen,' were the words that rang in his ears, with a storm of bullets. One of them stung his cheek, and he could feel the hot blood running down it; but it only acted like a spur. Never, even when he carried off 'the Pewter' in the university flat-race, two years (it seemed two centuries) ago, had he ever laid foot to ground so nimbly. Perhaps the guns came from Birmingham, but, in any case, they were not breech-loaders, nor double-barrelled; they had advanced all the leaden arguments they had to urge, and he had got clean away for that time, at all events; only, what troubled him was, that that soft sibilant noise—even at that supreme moment it struck him how like it was to kissing—was repeated, and repeated again, far, far in front of him, as though the whole hillside had been tenanted by ardent lovers. He guessed rightly—though the fact was not revealed to him just then—that it was the system of telegraphy used by the brigands.

This attempt to intercept him had been made within a few hundred yards of a large village, which a turn of the road now revealed to him. The houses were of tolerable size, and mostly built of stone; and since in every case the shutters were closed, and the absence of glass in the windows was not observable, the place looked as well to do as any petty provincial town in England. Walter took it as a matter of course that herein he would find succour and sympathy, even if he should be unable to procure a vehicle to carry him the remainder of his journey. But either the inhabitants were unanimous in their habits of early retirement, or what, after a few applications with his fist at a door or two, he began to think the likelier, the noise of the brigands' guns had induced them to shrink into their shells and simulate slumber. Not a single reply did he extract in answer to his repeated summons, till he reached the principal inn, where, in an up-stairs window, a light was still burning. Here the master of the establishment was so good as to come out to him in person, appearing in a large white cap, in which he might either have been cooking or sleeping, and but little else in the way of garments. There was no meat in the house, he observed with great volubility, and without giving Walter time to name his wants; nothing, indeed, to eat but macaroni. If the signor did not require food, so much the better; but seeing him to be an Englishman, his mind had naturally flown to meat.

'Have you no eyes?' interrupted Walter impatiently. 'Can you not see that my cheek is bleeding? I have just been waylaid by brigands.'

'Heavens! Is it possible? Brigands?'

'It is quite possible, as one would have thought you could believe, since it happened just outside your town. However, I want nothing from you but the means of getting away from it. I must have a carriage of some kind, in which to get to Palermo. These scoundrels have captured an

English lady and her father, and every moment is precious. Just give me a basin and some water, while the horses are being harnessed.'

Walter would not even enter the house, but stood at the door while he washed his wound, which turned out to be little more than a scratch.

'Now, when is that carriage coming round?'

He had seen one in the yard that adjoined the inn.

'You are welcome to the carriage, signor; but, alas! we have no horses, nor do I believe that there is one in the place. Two gentlemen have just stopped here with a tired pair from Termini, which we were unable to replace.'

'From Termini? Why, that is the way I have come! Did they not meet any molestation?'

'No, indeed, signor,' answered the innkeeper with a smile of incredulity, that seemed to say: 'Young gentlemen get scratches from other things beside musket-balls.' 'They certainly did not mention that they had been shot at.'

'Well, I have been shot at,' observed Walter with irritation; 'and I must get on to Palermo—those two things are certain.'

That his host was indisposed to offer him any assistance, and anxious to get rid of him, there was no doubt; and what Baccari had told him of the fear inspired in the villages by the brigands, convinced Walter of the reason.

'You do not seem very hospitable, my friend,' said he severely; 'and I shall make it my business, when I reach my journey's end, to let the police know how you have treated me. Where there is a carriage for hire, there are mostly horses'—

'There are none here,' interrupted the landlord sullenly; 'but if the signor can make good use of his legs, he cannot fail to catch the vehicle of which I have spoken, since the road is hilly, and it can scarcely move out of a foot-pace.'

The suggestion was not inviting; but as there seemed no alternative, Walter turned upon his heel, with an exclamation, which, being in pure Saxon, let us hope the innkeeper imagined to be a farewell blessing, and recommenced his journey. He had recovered his breath, and felt altogether 'like running.' If any Sicilian eyes were watching him through the closed shutters, as he moved lightly up the street, they would have seen what was probably a rarity to them—an English athlete in 'good form.' For boxing, though he could, as we have seen, give a well-delivered blow enough, Walter's frame was too slightly made; but for speed and endurance, few amateurs could touch him. He ran 'clean,' without that 'loppety' motion from which even professional runners are seldom free; and he knew how to husband his resources, while appearing to be putting forth his utmost powers. If the village landlord had told him the truth—a very improbable 'if,' it must be confessed, in any case, and, moreover, his words had had to Walter's ear a tone not only of sarcasm, but of malignity—he had little doubt of getting a lift on his way—of overtaking this carriage with two tired horses upon a hilly road; and even if there was no carriage, he was game to keep up his present pace to the gates of Palermo. The road, though it turned inland, was now much more open; he could see not only around him but before him; and presently he beheld, just disappearing at the top of a steep hill, some slow-moving vehicle.

What description of conveyance it was, he had not time to make out; but the sight of it gave wings to his feet. Even if it was but a laden cart, he might bribe the driver to let him take the horse out of it, and thereby reach the city half an hour earlier. At the top of the hill, a most splendid spectacle awaited him: the whole Bay of Palermo, even to Cape di Gallo, lay stretched beneath his gaze; the full height of Mount Pellegrino stood up black, except where the moonlight crowned it with silver; while before him was a defile winding between woods of spruce fir, through which, crossed by a stone bridge, leaped down white water to the sea. What delighted him most, however, was the sight of a wagonette and pair, with two men in it, which had just passed the bridge, and was making its way up the opposite hill. As he ran down towards it at the top of his speed, he fancied he heard once again the sibilant kissing noise run, like some light substance that rapidly catches fire, along the firs upon the left hand; but it might well have been the noise in his ears produced by his rapid progress; and, at all events, with help so near, there was no occasion for giving attention to it. The occupants of the carriage seemed to have heard it too, for, to his great joy, he saw it stop, and one man stood up in it, as if to look behind. Walter had no breath to waste in calling, but he drew out his white handkerchief as he ran on, to attract attention; and in this it seemed he had succeeded, for he saw the man making gestures to him; and in a few minutes more, he found himself panting and exhausted by the door of the wagonette.

Two Sicilians, not of the upper ranks, as it seemed to him, though they were somewhat profusely decorated with chains and jewellery, were its occupants, and he who had been standing up addressed him in courteous tones.

'Do you want a lift, signor?' inquired he.

'Indeed, I do,' said Walter, not waiting for a more formal invitation, but at once climbing up into the nearest seat. 'I am pursued and in trouble. Pray, tell your coachman to drive on, and I will tell you all as we go along.'

At a word from the man who had addressed him, the driver touched the horses with his whip, and off they went, though at a rate so slow, that a London cabman taken by the hour would have been ashamed of it.

While Walter was recovering his breath, he took an observation of his companions. The general impression which his first hurried glance had given him of their 'dressy' appearance was more than confirmed; if they had been Londoners, he would have set them down as belonging to the swell mob, or, rather, they were more like the representatives of that class in farces. They wore billy-cock hats, rather taller in the crown than those commonly seen in England; shooting-jackets of a burnt sienna colour—so it seemed by the moonlight—with enormous pockets both inside and out, such as poachers and gamekeepers use. So far, their dress was 'quiet' enough; but their waistcoats, which were of blue cloth, were covered with gilt buttons, sewn on like those of pages, not for use, but shew, and positively festooned with gold (or gilt) chains. To the shooting-jackets were attached a sort of hood, to throw over the head in case of rain; and round each man's waist was a broad belt, with a shot or cartridge pouch depending from it.

Under the seat opposite to Walter was a long gun, and he conjectured rightly that its fellow lay beneath him. Upon the whole, he came to the conclusion that these men were small tradespeople, who had gone out for a holiday in which sport—or what they thought to be so—had formed a principal feature. They had probably been shooting tomtits.

'If you could get your coachman to drive a little quicker,' said Walter, 'I should feel more comfortable while telling you my story; first, because it is of the utmost importance to me to get to Palermo as soon as possible; secondly, because, as I believe, we are upon dangerous ground.'

'Dangerous ground!' laughed he who seemed to take the lead as a superior mind. 'When did that come into your head, Signor Inglese?'

'I am perfectly serious, gentlemen,' said Walter gravely; 'and not only did the circumstance happen which I have described, but a whole band of these rascals have boarded an English gentleman's boat in the bay over yonder, and carried both himself and his daughter into captivity. My object is to give the alarm as soon as possible, that measures may be taken for their release.'

'Naturally,' answered he who sat on the same seat with Walter, 'if the Englishman is a person of consequence, they will probably send the troops after him immediately.'

'Just so: that is the plan I hope will be adopted. But, in the meantime, I repeat, I wish we could move a little faster. I would gladly bear the whole expense of the wagonette, if I might be allowed to have my way in this particular.'

'That is impossible, Signor Inglese,' answered the other with a courteous inclination of his head. 'We are proud to be able to do you this small service. And as for brigands, there are none so near Palermo as this—I do assure you.'

'And yet I could almost swear I heard them signalling to one another not five minutes ago, down there,' argued Walter, pointing towards the bridge. 'It was a cry like this;' and he proceeded to imitate it, not, it must be confessed, with great success. The attempt, however, excited the boisterous mirth of his companions.

'The signor must have heard the nightingales,' said one.

'Or the echo of his last parting from his mistress must have been still ringing in his ears,' observed the other. 'As for the brigands, what have we to fear, who carry guns. Would the signor like to take one for himself?' and he motioned to that which lay under the opposite seat.

Nothing loath to be armed in case of the worst, Walter stooped down to pick up the gun, when a heavy weight fell violently upon his shoulders, and he found himself face foremost upon the floor of the vehicle. He struggled violently to free himself; but the space was too confined for him to throw off the man who had leaped upon him; and in less than a minute, his confederate had attached a rope to his outstretched wrists, and fastened them firmly behind his back. When he was suffered to rise, the carriage had stopped, and the steps were already let down behind.

'Scende,' said one of his captors sententiously.

'Coachman,' cried Walter, 'you will bear witness what these men have done, and where they did it; they are brigands!'

Here something cold touched the tip of Walter's

ear: it was the muzzle of a pistol. 'If the signor speaks again, he dies,' said the voice that had addressed him so often. It was still quiet, and even courteous, but very firm.

Walter called to mind Francisco's advice about submission, should he fall into brigands' hands, and was silent. It was not likely where deeds were impossible, that words should avail him. The driver, too, it was now plain, was either in league with these men, or was afraid to oppose their wishes in any respect; he had never once turned round, so as to shew his face, and now he drove away, leaving his three fares in the road, with the same precaution. Walter had seen no more of him from first to last than Geoffrey Crayon, Gent., saw of the fat traveller. Ere the noise of the departing vehicle had died away, one of his late companions put his thumb and forefinger to his lips, and, whistling shrilly, produced the identical sound which had that night so often created his suspicions. It was at once replied to from the adjoining spruce woods, in half-a-dozen places, and as many men sprang out, each with a gun in his hand, and approached Walter and his captors.

'Your name?' inquired the man who had taken the lead in the wagonette, while the others stood round in an attitude of respectful attention.

'My name is Walter Litton; my profession, that of a painter; I am an English subject. To what money I have about me, you are welcome; and I swear that I will never give evidence against you, if you will only let me go free. Otherwise, this outrage will not pass unpunished.'

'The young cock crows loudly,' observed the other, laughing.

'Well, signor, you have told me your name, and now I will tell you mine. If you have heard it before, it will teach you what to expect, and how idle are all these ridiculous menaces. If you have not heard it, you will soon come to know me—I am *Il Capitano Corrali*.'

SOME BROKEN LIVES.

THERE is always a peculiar fascination about stories of literary struggle; and that fascination was seldom, if ever, more powerful than it is in the six biographical sketches which Mr Henry Curwen not long ago composed.* The subjects of his sketches may well be called examples of 'broken lives.'

On Wednesday, January 31, 1861, a notable funeral took place in Paris. Behind that lamented celebrity who was being carried to his last home, followed three thousand persons, bareheaded, and one hundred carriages; and amongst the mourners, or rather attendants, the Ministers of State and Public Instruction were all represented, as well as the Academy and the other learned bodies. No wonder a fair stranger from the provinces turned wonderingly to her neighbour, and inquired: 'Is it the funeral of a millionaire?' 'No, madam,' was the reply: 'it is the funeral of a pauper poet.' It was the funeral of Henry Murger, a poet whose poems were published for the first time upon the day of his death, and who died, just as his talents were becoming duly recognised, at the age of thirty-nine, from the effects of the want and misery of the unaided struggles of his youth.

* *Sorrow and Song: Studies of Literary Struggle.* By Henry Curwen. Henry S. King & Co.

Next day, they opened a subscription to erect a handsome monument to Murger's memory. Long ago, he had asked for bread; now they gave him a stone of the costliest! No doubt, it is very sad; but it is a question whether indignation, on that account, can be righteously vented against society, or any particular portion or individual of it. When a young man, listening to the promptings of genius (which, so far as material prosperity is concerned, is so often an evil genius), forsakes his own sphere, rejects his natural labour, defies the world, and becomes a law unto himself, the principal consideration, if he have really genius, is, whether he be strong enough to bide his time. There is no sort of doubt about this: that, if Henry Murger had been constitutionally strong enough to bide his time, he would have had his due reward; fame, honour, and riches, or, at anyrate, competence, were ready for him. Such men as he deserve just the sympathy we feel for the young soldier who succumbs to the hardships of a campaign, and cannot last until the time has come to gather the fruits of victory.

Henry Murger was born in Paris on the 24th of March 1822; and his father was *concierger*, or porter, of the house, in Rue St George, where the birth took place. How much the boy was indebted to his mother for his future misery and his future fame, cannot be accurately measured; but, inasmuch as she, with a quick motherly instinct, not unmingled with personal pride, was bold enough to declare that 'her darling was no common child,' but 'destined to become a *monsieur* (gentleman), not a mere tradesman,' it is probable that he owed to her a great deal of both. And when we consider how many mothers have the same notion concerning their darling boys, of whom very few come so near to justifying the prediction as Murger did, there is reason to wonder that the world—which already abounds with literary aspirants as needy and miserable and pretentious as Murger, but devoid of any particle of his genius—does not positively swarm with them. Murger's father, on the other hand, would, apparently, have liked to bring up the boy in such wise that he might ultimately have earned an honest, but not at all luxurious livelihood, by combining, after the paternal manner, the dignity of a door-porter with the utility of a tailor. The maternal flatteries are said to have been seconded by a 'voice that whispered: "Son of a tailor, thou shalt be a poet! The Parisians shall sing thy verses, as the fishers of Sorrento those of Tasso. Thou shalt be one of the chosen whom women crown with roses, and men with laurels. Thou shalt be loved and applauded. Go onward, child, to glory; onward towards love!"' The owner of the voice, however, either forgot to whisper anything about misery and starvation, and neglect and sickness, or thought that, the whole history of literature bristling with such warnings, it would be quite superfluous. And so Murger became one of the Bohemian brotherhood, who adopted for their motto, 'The Academy, the hospital, or the Morgue!' He was one also of a small society of young men, who called themselves *Euveurs d'Eau*, or 'Water-drinkers,' not by any means because they were teetotalers, but from the glass of water that each member drank when he took the pledges of the society. And at the moment when Murger began to be known, what had been the fate of the rest of the fraternity?

Two 'had died in the hospital; a third had gone to his native town, to beg the bread he could not find in Paris. Karol, the kindest of all, had expired in Constantinople, without a friend or franc to aid him in his extremity, after months of starvation in his futile endeavours to get pupils for French; Jules de la Madeleon was dead; Gérard de Nerval had, like Chatterton, grown weary of the struggle, and, seeking a like escape, had perished in his pride.' There is not much here to encourage young knights of the quill to throw up steady employment, and rush headlong into the lists of literature with a shout of 'Vive la Bohème!'

Of Novalis, it is almost certain, the ordinary English reader knows little or nothing. There is a vague echo of the name, perhaps, pervading many memories, and that is all. Not every one of those to whom the name has a sort of familiar sound, is aware that it was assumed for purposes of concealment, until, by force of fame, it completely absorbed the real name of Friedrich von Hardenberg, son of Baron von Hardenberg, director of the Saxonian salt-works. Nor, though Novalis may assuredly take his place in a category of broken lives, is there in the story of his short career anything of that terribly real and universally appreciable misery which startles and impresses one in the case of the literary Bohemian, and which goes straight home to the heart of whoever is liable to sordid wants, and whoever has a dread of starvation and the dead-house. Novalis 'passed away on the 26th of March 1801, in the twenty-ninth year of his age, leaving to us all a reputation full of promise and fragmentary works, that in their ruined splendour say something of what he might have become to Germany, and to the world of students that bow to German thought.' It was early for the golden bowl to be broken, and for the silver cord to be cut; but the drama of his life offers none of those appalling scenes which can rivet the attention, and enlist the sympathies of the least as well as the most refined combatants in the battle of life. Novalis was at one time assessor and law-adviser to the salt-mines of Thuringia, at another a chief-engineer; and, 'poet-prophet' though he was, he was 'very industrious in the duties of his office, attending to all things with willingness, and regarding nothing, of however little importance, as insignificant.' He did not go forth to fight the world, taking for his battle-cry, 'The Academy, the hospital, or the Morgue.' He was content to snatch what time he might from the ordinary work of men for his literary labours; and soft as well as sad are the incidents which, in his case, exercise over us a fascinating influence. There was no fierce struggle for daily bread, no half-tragic and half-comic experiences; he loved and lost, and he was cut off in the early flower of his age; we mourn with him at the grave of Sophie Küher, and we mourn for him, as he wastes away with consumption before his futile brain has been matured; we acknowledge the fascination of his story, but it affects us with only a gentle melancholy.

An extraordinary career, a veritable struggle, was the life of Alexander Petöfi, 'for his first twenty years a wandering vagabond—runaway schoolboy, idle student, common soldier, strolling player—often near starvation; outcast and very wretched, yet full still of vast ambitions and of an indomitable courage; then, in the five following

years, the idol of his country, and its greatest poet; . . . the popular orator; the party leader; the almost mythical hero of the battle-field.' Alexander Petöfi (or Petrovics) was a Hungarian, born near Pesth, on the first day of the year 1823. His family, in 1838, were completely ruined by the overflowing of the Danube; the father was compelled to fall back entirely upon his manual skill as a butcher, and the son was sent to the Lyceum at Schemnitz. But the boy, as is not unusual with poetical boys, found the discipline of school intolerable; ran away, and almost died of sheer hunger in the streets of Pesth, which he managed to reach; was inspired by some strolling players with a longing for a grand histrionic career, which he commenced in the unpromising capacity of a *super*, and which was prematurely closed by the arrival of his father, who captured him, took him home, and kept him for a while in bondage. Young Petöfi, in a short time, however, was offered a chance of going through the usual course at the university of Ödenburg; but no sooner had he arrived and 'walked round and round the building,' than with more than the alacrity shewn by S. T. Coleridge under somewhat different circumstances at Cambridge, and by E. A. Poe under stress of hunger, he inquired the way to the military dépôt, enlisted as a trooper, and, nobody will be surprised to learn, found that, if school-life was a purgatory, yet military discipline was truly infernal. He, like Coleridge and Poe, relieved the tedium of soldiering by literary composition; 'many of his popular songs were written with a piece of burnt stick upon the white-washed guard-house walls . . . and were recovered by him from the lips of his rough comrades, and written down on paper long after they had been effaced—as he thought, forgotten.' He was rescued from his military misery by a kindly surgeon attached to the staff, who, thoroughly understanding his case, procured his dismissal. Once more, a course at a university was proposed to him, and accepted; and, once more (after a short trial, this time), he fled from the abode of academical learning, and entered upon that 'grand histrionic career,' as a *super*, which had been so ignominiously cut short some years before. But his histrionic success did not reach quite to the level of grandeur; indeed, unpretentious as were the parts assigned to him by the 'common rogues and vagabonds' who made up the companies to which he attached himself, he was invariably jeered by the gaping rustics, who gathered in booth or barn; he was dismissed from company after company, though his wage was hardly bread enough to keep him from starvation, the laughing-stock of actors and public alike; and so, thinking that literature could not well prove a more unkindly calling, he halted at the outlandish town of Kecskemet, and, hiring the orthodox garret, at once set up in business as full-fledged man of letters. Then came the period, usual with the true children of 'sorrow and song' of cold and hunger and every sort of privation. The bitter storm was weathered in the ordinary way—by sheer endurance, by the scanty aid of friends, by the pitiful wages of a literary hack. But his hour was to come; and one day 'he awoke to find himself the most popular of Hungarian poets. He went nowhere but he heard his songs; when he retired to rest, they were the last voices of the

evening; when he left his bed, they were the first strains of the morning.' And he was still only twenty-three. Before long, he became a politician, nay, a leader of politicians, and a man of war—not exactly a soldier, for even Bem had no power to make him wear the regulation stock; and at last, in July 1849, or it may have been in August, he lay sleeping his last sleep amongst a heap of Hungarian patriots, whose bodies had been huddled unrecognised and unknown, into one enormous trench, upon some green heights, far from the Puszta that he loved so well. He had fallen in a charge against the Russians; but 'for years the peasantry refused to believe that their hero could be actually dead . . . and, while they sang his songs, they talked of his return, as the old Welsh harpers of the coming back of Arthur, as the Portuguese of King Sebastian.' His was truly a broken life, for he was but twenty-seven when he fell on the field of honour. His fame raises him to the regions of the sublime, his vanity sinks him to those of the ridiculous. It is almost incredible that he should have done the things he did. On board of a steamboat he encountered a nobleman who either did not or would not see him. Petöfi, after vainly endeavouring to attract his attention, halted dead in front of him, and exclaimed: 'Sir, I cannot possibly be unknown to you! You should have saluted me at once. I am Petöfi the poet!' What an instance of morbid vanity! There is a possibility of being great poets without common-sense.

The life of Honoré de Balzac was broken at the somewhat advanced age, for a child of 'sorrow and song,' of fifty; for he was born at Tours, on the 16th of May 1799, and he died on the 18th of August 1850. Still, he went through many a hard scene, and, as Victor Hugo said in his funeral oration at Père la Chaise, 'his life was short' (when we consider what he might have accomplished, had he reached the span of seventy), 'but full—fuller of work than days. This powerful and unwearied toiler, this philosopher, this thinker, this poet, this genius, has lived amongst us that life of storm and struggle, that life of quarrels and combats, common in all times to all our greatest men!' According to Mr Curwen, 'few men have been written about so much' as Balzac, and 'fewer still to poorer purpose,' for 'some score of so-called biographers' have told us 'of little but his vanity, his schemes, his extravagances, his debts, his hair, his cane, and his trinkets.' But, at anyrate, he belonged to the *suffering* brotherhood of literature. He, having made some small success, rather nominal than substantial, became a mark for what are called the vampire publishers, one of whom is sketched in bitterly lively fashion by one of Balzac's friends. We will not repeat the scandalous imputations that a publisher pays a writer not according to his ability, but the depth of his poverty. Balzac commenced his career obscurely. He became famous in the literary arena. When he died, it was thought an honour to bear his pall by Victor Hugo, Sainte-Beuve, Alexandre Dumas, and M. Baroche, Minister of the Interior.

In the case of Edgar Allan Poe, a truly broken life in every sense, Mr Curwen seems to have been actuated by a desire to whitewash, as far as possible, a character which, in its blackened condition, is by no means unfamiliar. The possibility, however, was, apparently, very small. Edgar

Allan Poe will most likely be always regarded as an instance of genius in its most admirable and most hideous form, the strangest intermixture of good and evil. Two reasons there were why he could not rise superior to the ills of life: he had no moral ballast, and he indulged in alcohol. It is all very well to say that one glass of wine would 'upset' him; he would not have come to much harm, if he had stopped at that amount of upsetting. If his life do not offer much that is worthy of imitation, his death is full of warning. In the early morning of the 5th of October 1849, in or near Baltimore, a policeman stumbled over something lying by the roadside. It was 'merely the body of a drunken man.' There were no papers, there was nothing to tell its name; and it was taken to the hospital. 'A drunkard suffering from *delirium tremens*,' said the students. On the 7th of October, 'the drunkard' was dead; and he turned out to be Edgar Allan Poe, who might have made fortune as well as fame, if he had not had 'a screw loose.'

Very violently broken was the life of André Chénier, a poet and a political martyr. He had published but two short poems up to the time of his death; nevertheless, he was acknowledged by all who knew him to be possessed of the rarest genius. And, a quarter of a century after his death, the judgment of those who knew him, including the most fervent of his admirers, Châteaubriand, was justified; for his works, then published, achieved a sudden, widespread, and lasting reputation. André Chénier was the victim of political vengeance; he had thrown himself, at the time of the terrible French Revolution, into the vortex of political life with a reckless daring; and, in the thirty-second year of his age, on the 25th of July 1794, he mounted the scaffold at the command of Robespierre. Three days after this, at this same Place de la Révolution, perished his murderer, Robespierre. But three days only, and André Chénier would have been saved! As Chénier walked up the wagon-steps, he 'gave one last regret to his broken life. "To die, to die! and yet I had something there!" he cried, striking his forehead with his hand. "It was the Muse," says Châteaubriand, "who in this supreme hour revealed to him his genius."

And what moral, if any, is to be drawn from these few broken portions of broken lives? The 'practical' will, no doubt, draw an easy moral from each; but, fortunately, or unfortunately, the young literary aspirant, whatever may be his peculiar bent, is eminently unpractical, and to him, the romance of a certain career will, until he tries it, seem to make up for everything else. Besides, there is the posthumous fame, about which everybody does not think as Falstaff thought; there are, probably, still amongst us men who would willingly die on the scaffold, if it would insure the publication and appreciation of their poems a quarter of a century afterwards. How much the manner of Chénier's death had to do with the attention ultimately bestowed upon his works, it is, of course, impossible to say, but it is pretty certain, that to have been a 'political martyr' would be calculated rather to attract than to repel the public. Political martyrdom is, in its tragical form, scarcely possible nowadays, at any rate in this country; but social martyrdom, notwithstanding what has been written and said

about the disappearance of the miseries of Grub Street, is still open to the 'free lance' of literature. It should be remembered, however, by youthful genius, that social martyrdom, in our times, meets with very little respect or sympathy, and that a publisher prefers to deal with talent which is not in absolute want of ready money.

ABOUT SPIDERS.

NATURE rewards with a bountiful hand all who earnestly worship at her shrine. Even to her humbler votaries, who leave the great highways of knowledge to wander along one of her secluded by-paths, she dispenses liberal favours, unfolding to their view many hitherto hidden beauties, in her endless variety of animal and vegetable life. Suppose we take a quiet stroll down one of these unfrequented by-ways, and see how much entertainment may be derived by studying the habits of that familiar but unappreciated little animal, the spider. This may be done without continually using scientific technicalities.

Rendering important services to man, and combining in her character many of those attributes reckoned admirable in others—patience, industry, courage, and a wonderful architectural skill—she is too often the victim of a prejudice as unreasonable as it is ignorant and unjust.

Perhaps none of the numerous spider family offers so many facilities for the accurate observation of her life and habits as the common garden-spider (*Epeira diadema*). Fixing her dwelling between the branches of the smaller bushes and shrubs, or between the railings of the garden, or, better still, in a sly corner in front of some convenient window, she affords easier opportunities for daily observation than any other variety. She is not at all particular which side of the window is selected, as she seems to thrive equally well whether inside or out, only losing, when inside, that brightness of colour which distinguishes the open-air dweller. Constructing a beautifully formed circular, or, as it is sometimes called, geometric net across a pane of glass, her every movement can be studied with advantage. From the centre of the work run radiating lines like the spokes of a wheel, attached at the outside end to long and much stronger lines, usually of a triangular shape, stretching from one side of the woodwork of the pane to the other. These radiating lines are again crossed by another set of concentric circular threads, at gradually widening intervals; making altogether, when finished, a piece of work of a more delicate texture than any dainty lady's embroidery. So wonderfully fine, indeed, are the materials of which it is made, that a thread only just visible to the naked eye has been proved, by some of the best entomologists, to have been spun out of a thousand different strands issuing together from the spider's spinnerets and tubes; the comparatively coarse threads of the house-spider containing about four hundred united strands. From the centre of the

web of the garden-spider, to her hiding-place in one of the upper corners of the window-pane, runs a strong cord-like gangway or passage, only connected with the main work in the middle. With her feet resting on one end of this connecting rope, she feels the slightest vibration of the net when a fly is caught, rushes to the centre, feels with her feet on which of the strands the fly is entangled, darts at once to the place, and soon finishes her victim. This spider is evidently guided to her prey more by touch than sight:

The spider's touch, how exquisitely fine!
Feels at each thread, and lives along the line.

Unlike the common house-spider (*Aranea domestica*), which rushes straight at her prey, and drags it at once in her mouth into her den, to be killed and eaten in darkness, the geometric-spider, even if a fly be caught near her hiding-place, runs first to the centre, to discover the whereabouts of her prey. Unlike the house-spider, too, she kills the fly on the web where it is caught; the rapid death of the victim shewing the virulence of the spider's poison, which is distilled into the wound through hollow fangs like those of a serpent. If the fly be a small one—say a midge—and lies perfectly still when caught, the spider will feel all the strands in the centre round and round two or three times, before finding on which part of the net the little tit-bit lies. When a wasp is caught, if the spider cannot see her way to a safe blow, she will either weave her enemy in a stronger mesh, and wait till the wasp is almost dead by exhaustion, or, if her network be in danger of being all broken up by such a strong intruder, she will cut the threads that hold it, and let her dangerous customer go. There is a little black fly, shaped like an ant, but smaller, often caught in one of these circular nets, which frequently escapes by wriggling itself clear. Whether it is furnished with some sharp weapon of defence, or has the power, some beetles are well known to possess, of emitting a pungent essence against its enemies, would be difficult to determine; but the spider soon beats a retreat when she finds she has caught a Tartar, and either allows it to wriggle itself free, or waits at a convenient distance until the fly is completely exhausted by its struggles.

Unless the fly killed on the open web be a very small one, the garden-spider does not carry her prey to her den in her mouth, but wraps it up in a bundle in a kind of sling, and runs to her lair with her victim hanging down behind her—cleverly preventing the loosely hung bundle from getting entangled on the way. Depositing the booty at the entrance of her tunnel-shaped home, she quietly enjoys her meal, sucks the body dry, usually removing all traces of her recent slaughter. When another spider appears upon the scene, however, her demeanour is very different. Gathering as many strands of her web as possible in her saw-like claws—which, when magnified, look proportionately much more formidable than those of a lion—she gives them a violent shake, when the intruder generally 'cuts' and runs. If the invader declines to move on when thus warned, but shews fight instead, it is curious to mark the cautious way they approach each other, evidently conscious

the encounter means death to one or both. Spreading out their legs on each side, as if to guard against a side-attack, and reaching as far as possible with their fore-legs, they open wide their jaws, and look very formidable indeed, each presenting to the other a 'horrid front.' It is a duel in which the one that can plant the first well-directed blow conquers. Once let the fangs of the one be planted in the other's body, and the one seized will curl itself up and quietly yield to an inevitable doom.

It is a question if, in their personal encounters with each other, these cunning creatures do not fight with a full knowledge of how to use poisoned weapons independently of their fangs. When approaching one another for that final gripe both seem to dread, they will stop, and place in their mouths first one, and then the other claw of the long fore-legs, with which it is part of their strategy to overreach each other. For what purpose? Is it to dip the claws in their poison-bags or glands, knowing that a single scratch inflicted on the body of an adversary by a poison-tipped weapon will eventually prove fatal?

The spider is surely the very Ishmael of insects; from the time, in early spring, when, bursting the strong yellow bag or cocoon in which the parent spider had deposited her eggs, the young ones take their solitary way through life, with their hands, as it were, against every one, and every one's hand against them. Even their matrimonial alliances, requisite for the propagation of their species, are formed with unusual precautions, not altogether unnecessary, when the bride, the larger of the two, not unfrequently finishes the honeymoon by devouring her luckless husband. The patience he shews in hanging about the residence of his intended, sometimes on the outskirts of the web, at others, on a few lines of his own, just outside, often for days together, without a bite to eat, is as exemplary, as the method he adopts to lure her from her cell, when she is in an amatory mood, is singular and amusing.

The circular web is perhaps better adapted to the fly-catching business than any other, as the proprietors drive a roaring trade, and soon wax fat, especially after the apparently painful process of casting the skin has been successfully accomplished, a process that leaves them for two or three days very weak, and devoid of their usual animation. After peeling off the skin, the legs are clear, and almost transparent, not unlike a piece of amber.

Towards evening, the garden-spider leaves her lair, and takes up her station in the middle of the web, with her feet resting on the radiating threads, ready on the slightest vibration to pounce upon her prey. Evening, too, is the time usually selected for gathering up her broken strands; though Kirby and Spence, in their admirable *Introduction to Entomology*, evidently go too far when they assert that the concentric circles of the geometric nets are all renewed every twenty-four hours; the patchy appearance of the structure, after being some time in use, being in strong contrast to its beautiful regularity when first constructed, which a total renewal would naturally restore.

The spider is never, apparently, off her guard, and is always either 'fishing or mending the net'—the proverb about catching a weasel asleep, being equally applicable to this wide-awake featherless fly-catcher. She is not a bad barometer either, for when rain is threatened—especially those warm,

summer showers that fill the earth with fragrance, and set the blackbird's rich contralto carolling through the air—this spider may be seen busily engaged arranging her 'parlour' for her welcome guests, the flies, whom she invites to 'walk in,' knowing that the coming rain will drive them for shelter to the nearest bush or building.

In striking contrast to the jolly open-air life of the garden-spider, is the dismal existence, that can hardly be called life, passed by many common house-spiders. Constructing a web of strong cloth-like texture, slung like a hammock, in some out-of-the-way corner, her life is spent in a state of chronic semi-destitution, waiting for the infatuated fly that may accidentally drop in. Her powers of endurance must be something wonderful. When hunger can be borne no longer, this spider—a determined cannibal, when nothing better can be had—will start on a hunting expedition after other spiders of a smaller kind, exercising in the nefarious quest a good deal of cunning.

The house-spider passes the winter in both the egg and perfect form. The writer, on the 10th of February, roused a large torpid house-spider from its sleep, which slowly, and with much difficulty, made its way up the wall to a crevice in the ceiling, evidently thinking with the sluggard, 'You have waked me too soon; I must slumber again.' On the same date, February 10th—a cold frosty day—a cocoon that was observed to be turning darker-coloured than others, was opened, and found to be full of perfectly formed young spiders, nearly black. Some of them began to move, and one fell out of the nest on to some paper beneath, when, on moving the paper, the young straggler was found hanging to it, four or five inches below; proving, that, as soon as spiders are hatched, they have the power of attaching themselves to any object they touch, by a line of their own making, strong enough to bear them. They evidently knew it was too early to separate, for, on being left to themselves, they were soon after found huddled together in a round heap, each in the shape the old ones assume when simulating death.

One of the prettiest, as it is certainly one of the most entertaining of our native spiders, is a small jumping species, called by naturalists *Salticus scenicus*, which, almost any sunny day in summer, may be seen dodging about on the window-sill, to get within leaping distance of some unconscious fly, on which it will spring, like a diminutive tiger, with fatal precision. Beautifully marked with black and white or black and brown stripes, this active little hunter manages to pick up a living without the trouble of manufacturing a web. The extraordinary manoeuvres practised by it are extremely amusing, and, to any sportsman fond of stalking his game, a quiet study of this little creature's method of getting near its prey without being seen, might repay itself.

Perhaps the smallest of our native spiders, as it is also the most handsomely shaped, is the active, ever on the move gossamer (*Aranea obtextric*). As the principle of the diving-bell was known to and utilised by an aquatic species of spider ages before its adoption by man, so the art of flying through the air without wings was regularly practised by the tiny gossamer-spider long before Montgolfier and the earliest aeronauts constructed their first balloons. Running to the topmost point

of a garden gate or railing, it will elevate its abdomen, and shoot out a streaming line until it is long enough to bear the weight of its small body; when it will spring into the air, and go floating on the current, with the gauzy thread gleaming in the autumn sun. Some entomologists affirm that this mysterious little animal, that has so long been a puzzle to them, has the power of shooting out its thread towards any object it pleases. It is hardly possible, however, that such an impalpable filmy substance, so exceedingly fine as to be quite invisible except when flashing in the sunshine, can do otherwise than go with the prevalent current of air.

Though they are occasionally met with during the summer, it is only towards the end of autumn that they appear at all numerous. Whence come they in such immense numbers some years, compared with others, covering our fields and lawns at dewy eve with an invisible network, which the morning sun transforms into a brilliant veil, clothing the earth as with a garment of silvery gauze, studded with liquid gems, until the dew evaporates, and leaves them again at liberty to resume their aerial flights?

Besides the varieties already noticed, there are other wanderers that might be studied with both pleasure and profit. There is, for instance, the long-legged shepherd-spider, that may be seen any time in summer, particularly in the hay-field, always apparently in a desperate hurry to be in time either for a feast or a fray. When that blessed millennium arrives when the lion shall lie down with the lamb, the shepherd-spider and our old friend, daddy-long-legs, will, no doubt, make a capital pair, and, forgetting their previous mortal feud, will live long together, and be as the story-books say, 'happy ever after.' All our native spiders are comparatively harmless to man, except one found occasionally in cellars, which causes a painful swelling by its bite, though this has been doubted by some careful observers. In some tropical countries, however, the bites of certain large spiders are considered very painful, if not dangerous; and Madame Merian's pathetic picture of a large spider killing a humming-bird, dragged from its nest, often doubted, has been confirmed by later travellers. Alas, poor humming-bird! In danger of extermination not from bird or beast of prey, but from the dictates of a heartless fashion, by which thy joyous life is sacrificed, that thy bright little body may adorn my lady's headgear!

Perhaps enough has been written about spiders to induce some of our readers to shew a little more consideration towards these useful, but often persecuted creatures. If some of their characteristics are calculated to inspire aversion, they, at anyrate, fill their allotted part in the economy of nature. They assist materially—along with other destroyers—in keeping down hosts of flies, that would soon become intolerable. The fecundity of some species of flies is so prodigious, it has been computed that three and their progeny would eat the carcase of a horse sooner than a lion would! Cobwebs, as they are called, may be offensive to people of a tidy turn, but, as Southey quaintly remarks, 'the more spiders there were in the stables, the less would the horses suffer from flies.' As the sluggard is commanded to 'go to the ant, consider her ways, and be wise;' so, in considering the ways of

other tiny beings, equally interesting, if not so popular, may we have wisdom enough to profit by their lessons of patience, vigilance, and industry.

THE LITTLE OLD GENTLEMAN.

'TALKING of that,' said Mr Wilson, getting up and poking the fire vigorously, 'reminds me of a little incident that occurred to me in my young days.'

The scene is the best parlour of the *Wallsend Arms*, at Cossop on the Sore, where there is a snug meeting of the Commissioners of Public Sewers for the district. The small silver-headed old gentleman who is poking the fire is a retired surgeon of the town; his colleague is Colonel Bowster of Cossop Priory, a tall, grizzled, ex-cavalry officer; and the red-faced, merry-looking man in the corner is a local lawyer, the clerk to the Board. Wine and biscuits are on the table. There is nothing particular to be done, but they are bound by act of parliament to sit till two o'clock, and it is now barely one.

'It wouldn't do to smoke, I suppose?' says the colonel, looking dolefully out of the window; a wet dripping day, a High Street deserted of passengers, depression prevailing everywhere. 'It wouldn't do to smoke, eh?'

'Well,' replies the lawyer doubtfully, 'perhaps it wouldn't be quite regular, eh?—What do you say, Mr Wilson?'

'Personally, I haven't the slightest objection,' replies Wilson; 'but whether public opinion would quite sanction the members of a public Board—on public business—What do you think, colonel?'

'No, no; I see that—I quite see that,' said the colonel, relinquishing his hold of his cigar-case, and yawning dolefully.

'Try a pinch of snuff, colonel,' said Wilson, producing a little horn snuff-box, and tapping the lid with his knuckle. 'Public opinion can't object to snuff!'

The colonel stretched out his hand for the snuff-box, took a pinch, and then examined the box in a listless way.

'That box,' went on Wilson, 'is connected with a curious incident in my early life.'

'Well, let's hear it, Wilson,' said the colonel, good-naturedly; 'anything's better than sitting here doing nothing.'

'Well, when I first joined the medical school of St Joseph's,' began Mr Wilson, seating himself by the fire with a glass of sherry in his hand, which he sipped now and then in the pauses of his narrative—'when I first joined the medical school, and made my acquaintance with the dissecting-table, there was a person in the habit of frequenting the dissecting-room whose position and calling were for a long time a puzzle to me. He was a fine tall man, well dressed, generally in a blue swallow-tailed coat with brass buttons, a canary-coloured waistcoat, white kerseymere trousers, and Hessian boots; quite a buck, in fact; and he would walk up and down the room dandling a great bunch of seals that hung at his fob, and gave himself as many airs as a Queen's physician. The professors seemed to know him well, and treated him with a sort of sarcastic deference; he would often be called out, and closeted with the authorities of the school. Altogether, he held an important, although unrecognised position at St Joseph's. The elder students,

when I asked them about him, only mystified me; and at last my curiosity became so strong, that I determined to satisfy it at the fountain-head. So, one day, when I happened to be alone with him in the dissecting-room, I said to him: "Mr Blackstock" (that was the gentleman's name), "I see you here a great deal; pray, excuse me for asking you what is the exact position you occupy in the medical profession?" He turned rather red, and looked down upon me in a haughty kind of way. "Sir," he said, "I am Purveyor-general to the Faculty!"'

'Purveyor—exactly,' said the colonel, as Wilson paused to sip his wine. 'Had 'em in the Crimea, I recollect—provided medical stores, and so on. Ah, your friend was a purveyor, then, Wilson?'

'Aha! not that sort of a purveyor, colonel. Perhaps you might make a guess at his particular line. Give it up, eh? Well, sir, they were subjects—subjects, as we called them; in plain terms—bodies.'

'Body-snatcher, eh?' cried the lawyer. 'Ought to have been hanged.'

'Well, I don't know whether that wasn't his eventual fate; but there were many worse fellows than Blackstock. I'll tell you a little incident that illustrates his kindness of heart. I think I may almost say that he saved my life.'

'I must tell you that Blackstock had a little dog, called Bingo, the most extraordinary dog you ever saw. He was a yellow dog, of a sickly, unwholesome yellow, without a particle of hair on his body but a tuft at the tip of his tail. He was always with his master.'

'I mention Bingo,' said Wilson, with a low chuckle, 'because he's necessary to my story; and I may remark, that notwithstanding his repulsive appearance, there was something very intelligent—I might almost say human—in his expression. And yet, he was morose in disposition, attached to medical students, whom he recognised with marvellous instinct, but to the rest of the world, sullen and defiant. But to proceed. One evening, or, rather, I should say one morning, at a very early hour—between two and three—I happened to be returning with a friend, one Jackson, from some scene of gaiety, to my rooms in Marylebone. On our way we passed the church of Saint Giles Overreach. Perhaps it wasn't Saint Giles, for my memory is not always accurate on these minor points, but, anyhow, a church with a large churchyard about it, that was surrounded by a high wall, on the top of which was a very spiky *chevaux de frise*. The public footway ran close beside this wall, hardly a foot in width; and the road was very bad just then; in fact, at that season of the year—mid-winter—an impassable slough or quagmire. It is not yesterday I am talking about, mind you; in fact, it was before the time of street gas-lamps. The road was dimly lighted with an oil-lamp that swung in a bracket from the churchyard wall, and the next light was round the corner, quite out of sight. Well, my friend and I were pushing along at full speed, in a very cheerful mood, laughing and singing; but when we came to the foot of the church wall, all looked so gloomy and ghost-like, the black dank wall, the sullen lamp throwing a sort of sickly gleam on the sea of mud below, that involuntarily we grew silent and came to a stand. "Here goes, Jack!" cried my friend, and scampered hastily along the footpath, whilst I followed

him at full speed. It was narrow enough, and some of the stones were loose, and if you lost your balance, you were up to your knees in black mud ; so that I had enough to do to see where I put my feet without looking aloft. All of a sudden, rap-bang I struck my head against something—something that gave way, and swung backward and forward, hitting me at each swing, and bringing me to a complete stand-still. Well, I cast my eyes aloft, and saw, perched on the top of the church wall, sitting on the *chevaux de frise* as comfortably as you, colonel, would sit a saddle, a little man in black, who was holding a rope in his hand, and from this rope hung a long narrow package, wrapped up in black tarpaulin—the package, in fact, against which I had knocked my head.

‘A body, probably,’ suggested the colonel.

‘A very fair inference,’ said Wilson. ‘Well, I must tell you that it was an understood thing in the profession that none of us should take any notice of anything of that kind. Public feeling was very high on the point, and I wouldn’t have given sixpence for the life of anybody caught in the act ; whilst the true interests of humanity demanded that the medical schools should have the means of teaching practical anatomy. So I should have scampered on, and taken no more notice, but, as ill-luck would have it, a dog began to bark from inside the churchyard. It was impossible to mistake that bark—it was Bingo’s. Some spirit of mischief entered into me, and I cried out, in a gruff, disguised voice : “What ! Blackstock, are you busy, then, to-night ?” and ran on. For a moment, my voice seemed to have struck terror into the hearts of the resurrectionists. The body came down to the ground with a crash, and turning round, I saw the little man sitting astride the wall, like one stupefied. But the next moment he dropped softly down, and pursued us. Well, we ran on like the wind—we were both good runners—and yet we could not shake off these pursuing footsteps. The faster we went, the faster they seemed to follow ; and I assure you my blood ran cold in my veins, till, turning the corner of the street, we met a party of the watch with staves and lanterns, at whose appearance our follower hastily decamped ; and having explained to the watchmen that our flight was a mere youthful frolic, we reached my friend’s lodgings in safety. I sat for some time within, talking over the adventure, and then made my way to my own rooms, which were at the end of the next street, looking over my shoulder at every corner to make sure that I was not being watched.

‘Well, gentlemen, when I reached my own door, imagine my chagrin to find that I had lost the key. It was a large street-door key—latch-keys were little in use in those days—and I could not think how I had managed to lose it ; but there was the fact ; it was gone, and I was locked out in the street this cold, dreary, winter’s night. I knocked and knocked in vain ; my landlady slept at the top of the house, and was as deaf as a post. I roused the neighbourhood, but made no impression upon her. Then I returned to my friend’s lodging ; but had no better fortune there ; and, tired and cold, I was obliged to patrol the neighbourhood for three or four hours before I could gain admittance. I was not without fear that my friend of the churchyard might be dogging my footsteps ; but I saw nothing to excite further alarm. Apparently, we had thrown him off the trail altogether.

‘As soon as I got back to my own rooms, I went to bed, and did not get up till nightfall. The cold seemed to have got into my very bones. In the meantime, my landlady was loud in her complaints against me for the loss of her key ; and as soon as I rose and had dressed, I was obliged to go to a neighbouring locksmith to try and replace it. But the locksmith had no key that would fit ; and I found that it would cost as little to have the lock replaced as to have a key made on purpose. I ordered a lock, therefore, very unwillingly, for it would cost four or five shillings, a sum that I could ill spare. I was sitting in a meditative mood, depressed by rheum, and chagrined at the waste of so much money, when the locksmith, who had left the house half an hour before, having taken the measurements for the lock, returned, and asked to see me.

“I have good news for you, sir,” he said, smiling ; “the key has been found, and you will be able to get it back for nothing. Such a nice, merry, old gentleman has found it, sir ! I’ve brought him with me to see you, and I’ll bring him upstairs, if you’ll allow me.”

‘A merry old gentleman he proved to be, with tightly strapped trousers, very curly brimmed hat, and a spencer.

“Ah, merry dogs !” he cried, when he saw me. “Gad, I wish I was young again. Oh, what games, what jolly games ! Keys ! bless my heart, what do we care about keys ; fling ‘em away in the street, bless my heart !” And so the old gentleman ran on. The locksmith took his leave ; but the merry old fellow remained, laughing and chatting away.

“Then you really have found my key, sir ? I am very much obliged by the trouble you have taken. Pray, how did you find me out ?”

“Ha, ha !” cried the old gentleman ; “lose a watch, go to the watchmaker ; find a key, go to the locksmith.”

“And will you kindly let me have my key ?”

“All in good time, in good time. It isn’t here, my boy ; I hadn’t a pocket big enough. I should have been obliged to hire a coach to carry it ; ha, ha ! You must come and fetch it, that’s the fact. Come and crack a bottle with me, you and your gay young friend ; jolly dogs ; ha, ha !”

‘I was little disposed to turn out ; but my new friend was so pressing in his invitation ; and being anxious to recover my key, I was persuaded to accompany him. We called upon my friend, who, being rather a gay young fellow, and fond of wine, made no objection to a bottle ; and so we accompanied the old gentleman home in a coach which he hired, to his house, full of life and merriment all the time.

‘The old gentleman’s house hardly corresponded in appearance with the character of its owner. It was decidedly dark and gloomy, in a low-lying neighbourhood, somewhere near the river. But the old gentleman had boasted so much of his cellar, and had given us in his conversation such glimpses of his hospitable way of life, that we did not doubt we should be well entertained, notwithstanding the unpromising look of his abode.

“Now, my boys,” he cried, pushing us in before him, “first door to the right. And I’m away to the cellar to get a bottle of my very best. In the meantime, refresh yourselves with a pinch of snuff.” He gave us a candle and his snuff-box, the identical little box I now hold in my hand, and left

us in a low-roofed, villainous-looking chamber, its walls black with the dirt of years, festooned with cobwebs, and furnished with only a few broken chairs and a table.

"An eccentric, evidently," said my friend, when the old gentleman had left us alone; "rich too, I'll be bound. Perhaps, as he seems to have taken a fancy to us, the old fellow will make us his heirs."

"He kept us waiting so long, that we began to be uneasy—late at night, in a strange place, the aspect of which was not reassuring; and yet we could not doubt the respectability of the little old gentleman. Presently, we heard his voice, as he sang and shouted merrily, and he returned, carrying in one hand a bottle, and in the other swinging on his finger my key. As he entered, we noticed, for the first time, a tremendous scar below his right eye, the result, as it seemed, of some old wound.

"Now, my lads, I won't leave you in this old lumber-room any longer; come into my own little snug, and we'll crack a bottle, and make a merry night of it. We've got the key, we've got the key—And we won't go home till morning!" shouted the old gentleman, in the most hilarious voice, snatching up the candle, and leading the way through a door at the further end of the room that opened into a dark narrow passage. Just as he entered the passage, the old gentleman, as if by accident, dropped the candle, so that everything was in profound darkness.

"Come along, come along; we shall find a light at the other end," called the old gentleman merrily. "Give me your arm, young sir, give me your arm."

"I was following him without thought or hesitation, as was my friend, when all of a sudden I heard, from what seemed the bowels of the earth just in front of me, the barking of a dog; it was Bingo's bark among a thousand. "Back, back!" I cried, recoiling with such force that I dragged the old gentleman several paces backwards: he lost his hold; I heard a cry, a splash. "Back, back!" thrusting my friend into the room we had quitted. The door behind us had not swung to, for Jackson had not passed quite through into the passage, and there was such terror and warning in my voice, that he sprang back instinctively, and regained the room we had left. The door went to with a bang; it closed with a spring-lock, and there was no means of opening it. We stood together in the darkness, our arms clasped together, not daring to move to one side or the other, lest some pitfall might open beneath us. We saw at once that we had been entrapped into this house to be made away with. We had been lured into an *oubliette*, from which we should hardly escape with life. We had been hunted down by the body-snatchers, whose safety demanded our destruction.

"At this moment, a light appeared beneath the door by which we had first entered, and presently the door itself was opened, and a face appeared, pale, ghastly, and drawn up with strong emotion. A dog ran forward, barking loudly. Next moment, the dog began to jump and fawn upon us.

"Ha, Bingo!" I cried in a voice that I tried to make calm and assured: "where's your master, Bingo? Where's the purveyor?"

"The man stepped into the room suddenly, and flashed his light upon us. It was Blackstock. "What! Mr Wilson," he cried, "Mr Jackson!

Ah! I never dreamt it was you. Pray, what are you doing here?"

"We have come here by invitation," I said unconcernedly, "to drink a bottle of wine with a little old gentleman."

"Ah!" said Blackstock, with a forced kind of laugh: "I know him. *Have you been in there with him?*"—pointing to the passage.

"No," I said; "no. He left us just now, and hasn't come back."

"Blackstock looked first at me, then at the dog, which was wriggling and fawning at my feet. "Ah," he said, "you were always kind to Bingo, sir. Step this way."

"We followed him, cautiously enough, down a flight of stairs, at the bottom of which he flung open a door, which led into the street. How delicious was the breath of the air upon our cheeks!

"Good-night, gents," said Blackstock. "You'll keep your tongues between your teeth, I know, for your own sakes and another time. Don't you mention names, sir. You've been precious near kingdom come, gents, this night. Good-bye."

"We never saw anything more of Blackstock in our dissecting-room; but a few days after the occurrences of that night we had a new subject, which turned out to be "the little old gentleman." Of course, it was no use returning his snuff-box, and I have kept it ever since, as a memento of an occurrence I should otherwise sometimes fancy was but a dream."

"Yes, he was a kind-hearted individual, your Mr Blackstock, as you remarked when you began your story," said the colonel, yawning violently. "Why, it's two o'clock! I never spent a longer hour in my life. Well, good-bye, Wilson; gentlemen, good-day!—By the way, Wilson, what became of the key?"

"I've no doubt it is at the bottom of the river to this day," said Wilson, with a chuckle. "Adieu, my friends."

HEARTSEASE:

A SONG TO MY WIFE.

HOME in her heart,
Flower all fair;
Never depart;
Ever bloom there;
All thy dear balm,
Heartsease, impart;
All thy blest calm
Home in her heart.
Sorrow and sighs
Follow the sun;
They with him rise;
They with him run;
Hers be thy peace,
Till life depart;
Till her days cease,
Home in her heart.
While thou art there,
How can I mark
How grief and care
Day would make dark?
Can sadness come,
Can smiles depart,
While thou canst home
Deep in her heart?

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